

THE
METHODS
OF PROMOTING
EDIFICATION

BY
PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS:
AN
ORDINATION-SERMON.

TO WHICH IS ADDED
A
CHARGE.

BY
JAMES FORDYCE,
MINISTER AT ALLOA.

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N. B. The following Sermon and Charge were
delivered at the ordination of the reverend
Mr. JOHN GIBSON, minister at St. Ninians,
May 9th. 1754. The notes were added
afterwards.



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LET ALL THINGS BE DONE
TO EDIFYING.

BRETHREN AND FATHERS,

YOU need not to be told, that, in the infancy of our religion, many of it's disciples were endowed with certain spiritual gifts out of the reach of unassisted nature; not for their own private use, but solely for the edifying of the church. It should seem that some gross abuses were committed amongst the Corinthians, in the exercise of those miraculous powers, through a spirit of selfishness and vain-glory. The great Master of the Gentiles sets himself to rectify these disorders, by exposing at full length the evil of them, and adjoining directions for the conduct of Christian assemblies; to the end, that such as spoke and presided there might do all things 'decently and in order,' and might preserve throughout a sovereign regard to the grand interests of edification: which regard he recommends with repeated admonitions, in this and a former chapter, but no where more directly than in the words before us: 'Let all things be done to edifying.'

4 E D I F I C A T I O N B Y

A rule of supreme and invariable use in that and every succeeding age of the church, manifestly founded in right reason, and powerfully enforced by all the principles of piety and goodness! So long as these remain unaltered, it's general application will still be the same; how greatly soever particular circumstances may happen to differ. And therefore as the ministrations of Christianity, ever since the times of inspiration, have been commonly confined to authorized teachers; the natural improvement of our Apostle's maxim will be to enquire, 'By what methods, we the clergy may best promote the edification of the people, in our management of the public institutions.' Nor can I conceive an enquiry more important in itself, or more proper on the present occasion. May I not hope, that the apparent delicacy of the subject will procure a favourable examination of what I am about to offer on it; the rather, that you will remember it was purely in obedience to your commands I undertook this task at first, which I now enter on with equal diffidence of myself, and deference to your superior judgment, depending on Heaven alone for assistance and success?

I. To begin with the consideration of those devotions, which we have the honour to lead in our religious assemblies; let us speak,

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First of all, concerning prayer, with which it hath been thought our earliest predecessors in the faith did probably open their public worship, and with which we ought certainly to open our's; would we follow the order laid down in our well known Directory, that may be pronounced in general an excellent standard.

I doubt not, my brethren, but you have frequently observed, that when the minister of God hath been addressing him in the name, and as the mouth, of the people, the greatest part of them appeared to be doing any thing rather than joining in the solemn service. In reality, there is no exercise of a spiritual nature, which the generality seem to regard so little or to attend so listlessly. — Seem, did I say? The expression is much too feeble. Their insensibility, their irreverence in this respect, are, from the whole of their deportment on such occasions, most shamefully distinguishable and flagrant.

We must all sore lament so great and so prevailing an evil. But do we bestir ourselves heartily to reform it? — Do we take care to remind our hearers of the indecency and impiety of such a behaviour? Do we admonish them to guard against it? Do we even adjure them by every thing ho-

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ly, 'to wait upon Jehovah without distraction?' Are we at pains to shame them out of so irreligious a levity, by representing to them the superior airs of recollection and seriousness, which are seen about many an honest worshipper, whom they are ready to despise, perhaps to damn, amongst Papists, Turks, and Indians, when employed in the immediate acts of their mistaken devotion? Above all, are we ourselves careful to perform the heavenly office with that solemnity, fervor, and elevation which we might, and which if we did, would doubtless contribute not a little at once to compose, to kindle, and to exalt our fellow votaries? — Let us be ingenuous, my brethren. Can we truly say, that when we are officiating in the congregation, as the priests of the Most High, our own hearts do always appear engaged? If not, how should we expect to engage the hearts of others, or to communicate a flame we do not feel, or so much as seem to feel? Must not a cold unanimated prayer from us, unavoidably tend, by the powerful sympathy of nature, to deaden the devotional feelings in those who are possessed of them? How then should it ever help to excite them in those who are not?

On the other hand, did we appear profoundly awed by the presence of the Divinity, and pressed

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down with a sense of dependence, of guilt, and of want; yet supported by faith, inspirited by hope, and heaving, so to speak, with holy aspirations; did we appear in one part melted into contrition, in another enflamed with gratitude, in another rapt into admiration, in another expanded with benevolence, and in all labouring to vent an overcharged soul in the bosom of God; our aspect, voice, and demeanor still corresponding to those internal sensations, and exhibiting them by turns with a natural simplicity; I say, did we appear thus affected in our addresses to the Supreme, it is hardly possible but the people must be struck and charmed with a spirit that was productive of such admirable effects. Those who do themselves partake of it, must needs perceive it set all on fire by these intenser radiations of it; and those who do not, must be prompted at least to wish that they did: for that must surely be esteemed both an amiable and a venerable thing which can inspire emotions so mild, yet so sublime, and give birth to a deportment at once humble and great.

But how is all this to be acquired? How, but by much practice in our closets, and continued pains taken with our hearts, to enure them to the various perceptions and movements of the inward life, and to accustom them to represent these in

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their own native stile and manner, without restraint, or stiffness, or any of those little illiberal formalities, that would check their generous impulses, or confine the free effusions of the soul.

This hinders not but that we may likewise prepare more directly for our public devotions, by private meditation on the materials that must compose them; and even by writing these down with care, both from our personal fund, and from collections which others have published. On the contrary it is to be wished, that much more of this kind were practised than probably there is; as it might be exceedingly useful, not only to give our prayers a greater latitude and diversity, but to render them more judicious, more proper, and more expressive. Indeed, my brethren, we cannot be too careful to prevent our throwing out any thing in those sacred addresses, dishonourable to God, prejudicial to religion, or disgraceful to ourselves. A great deal more, a vast deal more depends on our performing this duty with judgment and propriety, than perhaps we are always aware of. No, we cannot, I repeat it again, we cannot possibly exceed in our caution not to abuse the liberty left us in this important article of our public prayers. God grant we may all learn to weigh them more thoroughly than ever!

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But would there be no danger of their degenerating into lifeless forms, were we to bestow all this attention and study on the materials of them? Not so long as we did not tie ourselves too servilely to those we had provided, but only made them a sort of ready help, or easy vehicle, for conveying more happily that inward spirit, and those divine conceptions, which we have derived from a course of intimate correspondence with God.

We mentioned, just a little since, a greater diversity and latitude in our prayers; by which we meant to suggest, that they ought to be made as comprehensive as possible, by suiting them to different characters, conditions, and cases, such as daily occur in civil and in religious life, and also by including in them the most material branches of the Christian temper and practice, or specifying the virtues of both in such a manner as to make them be distinctly noted by the hearers. Sundry advantages would probably attend such a particularity and compass of matter. — The people would more readily find themselves interested, and touched, by addresses, that were adapted to their respective circumstances and feelings, and the fitness whereof they could immediately perceive from their own experience or observation. — They would learn to set a value on the best things,

when made, from time to time, the principal object of their vows and supplications at the throne of God. — And they would come to consider these as directly subservient to real and universal goodness, and only so far profitable as they did actually promote it. At present, it is to be feared, they are pretty much in danger of overlooking often this connexion between devotion and virtue, or what we may call the system of worship, and the system of morals, and between their own concerns and the minister's prayers. In short, they are ready, I doubt, very many of them, to regard their attending to those prayers as a formal and tedious task, which they comply with out of decency or custom, but from which they neither expect pleasure nor propose improvement.

Permit me to observe further, that the intercessory part should be ordinarily as full and strong as we can make it; not only for the reasonableness and delightfulness of the thing itself, but on purpose to impress the hearers with an habitual idea of the high importance of humanity, brotherly love, and public spirit*. It were to be wished in particular, that when we pray for our brethren in Christ, we

* It appears, in this view, a well judged rule of our Directory already mentioned, to intercede for the public in the prayer before sermon chiefly, rather than in

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could find in our hearts to take an ampler range than is sometimes done, by extending the expressions of our charity to Christians of every sect and party; recommending them without exception to the common Parent and Redeemer of

that after it. Such, we know, is the practice of our dissenting brethren in England, and elsewhere. Can any reason be assigned for our inverting this order? Doth not the delaying our intercessions till the last, look a little selfish; and tend naturally, though perhaps insensibly, to make those that join us, consider the more general interests of religion, and mankind, as of inferior concernment? Not to say, that their attention and patience are commonly by that time well nigh worn out; so that they have mighty little disposition left for what remains. As to ourselves, it cannot be dissembled, we are frequently so exhausted by the preceding service, as to be but in ill condition for performing this part with proper spirit or at due length; which may be probably one reason why we no sooner come to it, than we are ready all at once to alter both our manner and our voice, and to fall into an indifferent air and hurried pronunciation; as though we were glad to have done with it, or thought it some how of less moment; a circumstance surely not the most graceful or edifying. — I had like to have omitted noticing, that the petitions, contained in that divine form and pattern of prayer, which our Master hath given us, begin with the highest and widest interests, and end with the more private and personal ones; at the same time that they all run in the charitable plural.

Having mentioned that best of prayers, may I here take the liberty to ask, why it is so much overlooked

us all; even hoping well concerning such of them as differ from us most widely, provided they are sincere in their belief and conscientious in their practice; and longing ardently for that glorious period in the administration of Jesus, when accord-

by the greater part of the clergy of Scotland? This neglect of it is the more surprising, that the very Directory, which we profess to follow, doth expressly recommend it to us, 'not only as a pattern of prayer, but as itself a most comprehensive prayer, to be used in the prayers of the church.' It is not indeed easy to comprehend how we come, both in this and in several other instances, to depart so widely from our own received and justly admired model.—Were the Lord's Prayer to be used amongst us, many of the people, it will be said, would take exception at it. Possibly they might do so for a while. But is that to be held as a sufficient bar against a thing confessedly excellent in itself, and enforced upon us by acknowledged authority? I should humbly think, it ought to be used so much the rather, in order to conquer a prejudice so unreasonable and so unchristian. It must be surely both unreasonable and unchristian in an high degree, for any to take exception at that prayer, which the adorable person, they call their Prince and Saviour, did again and again teach his disciples.—But were it once introduced, would such people be apt to say, it might grow into an empty form. I answer, so may every other prayer, if we are not on our guard.—But it might be abused to bad purposes. And what good thing may not, if men are so minded?—But it is used in the church of England. There, I suppose, is the grand objection. And is this a rational objection? Would it not hold equally against

ing to the nobly figurative language of an ancient Prophet, 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and
'the leopard shall lye down with the kid, and the
'calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together;
'and a little child shall lead them; and the suck-
'ing child shall play on the hole of the asp; and

our praying at all, or our performing any one duty of religion, which is performed in that church? Why are not those persons offended at our dismissing the congregation constantly with the very same form of blessing, which is practised in that church; more especially as neither our Master in Heaven, nor our directors on earth, have prescribed it?—But is not the Lord's Prayer repeated in the church of England much too frequently, for preserving the proper reverence? Undoubtedly it is. This however makes nothing against the sober and serious use of it. Do we never repeat any of our own prayers? Do we never fall into forms of our own making? When we do, are any offended? Would they not be reckoned very captious, if they were? May we use our own forms, but not our Lord's? Are we wiser and better than all our presbyterian brethren in every other country, than all our Christian brethren of every other communion, by whom this incomparable prayer is and hath been universally used? Or do we place any part of our glory in differing from the rest of our fellow worshippers throughout the whole church of Christ? Should we not be rather ambitious, whilst we take care to avoid their errors and defections, of harmonizing with them in every thing that is sound and right, and of thereby rendering more perfect that symphony of souls on earth, which is so delightful to the ear of the God of love, and so like the music of the spirits in heaven?

‘the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den; and they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God.’——Is there not reason to hope, that the frequent hearing of so benevolent a strain, more especially if uttered with becoming warmth, might help to wear out that bigotry to names, and narrowness of soul, which are so contrary to the unconfined and elevated genius of the gospel, and gradually to introduce the Christ-like virtues of forbearance, moderation, and catholicism?

So much for the manner and the matter of our prayers. Let us touch a little on the stile of them. Now it is abundantly obvious, that whatever hath the appearance of art or study must be of all things most unsuitable here, where nothing should be seen but the workings, nothing heard but the dictates, of the heart. Therefore the more simplicity, the better; so there be nothing low nor flat. Neither indeed is this simplicity at all inconsistent with the utmost sublimity of diction. Or to speak more properly, whatever is truly simple is for that very reason, perhaps, in many instances sublime, whilst it exhibits truth and nature in their unveiled and original majesty.

May we not venture to add, that our perform-

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ances in this kind will be so much the more affecting, if there appears in them a certain happy irregularity; since we may generally observe, that a mind, labouring under any strong emotion, expresseth itself abruptly, with breaks, with pauses, with repetitions? This we may universally affirm, that when men are most in earnest, they are least solicitous about the exactness of connexion, the niceness of transition, or the elegance of speech. At the same time it is remarkable, that then very often the boldest phrases, the brightest figures, the most highly beautiful and significant terms, are naturally suggested. And we have already supposed in the case before us, that a man hath been at all due pains to furnish himself with the fittest expressions, as well as ideas for this exercise, and to acquire a facility in performing it.

The truth is, any one, who hath a tolerable command of scripture-language, needs seldom or never be at a loss to clothe his conceptions before the Almighty; as it is certainly beyond comparison rich, emphatical, and lofty; and likewise carries with it commonly a fine simplicity that is perfectly inimitable. Nevertheless, might it not be made a question, whether a series of sentences from scripture continued throughout a whole prayer, with little or nothing else, as is often done, be al-

together so well calculated to affect the bulk of hearers, to whose ears with constant use they are necessarily become trite and familiar? in like manner, as the noblest sentiments that have been frequently heard, or the grandest scenes that have been frequently seen, are seldom found to make any sensible impression, at least on minds that are not very intellectual, and where circumstances particularly striking do not concur to enforce them. Besides that, one should imagine, the vastly different idiom of European language, and lower strain of European genius, compared with the eastern, would require the frequent use of our home-phrasology in prayer, to give it a turn and look more natural to us, more characteristic of our genuine perceptions, and consequently less customary and formal; yet not so as in the least to exclude a well chosen mixture from the sacred writings, which will give a wonderful heightening and lustre to all the rest. A remark that seems justified in general by the composition of those devotional pieces, which are commonly esteemed to be in the truest taste and spirit; where we find the language of inspiration adopted but now and then, very sparingly indeed for most part; and where the pious soul appears to speak spontaneously as from an inward fund, breathing out her real feelings in a stile ra-

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On the whole, my brethren, may we not safely conclude, that a province so honourable and important as that of leading the devotions of a Christian assembly, merits our utmost attention to understand it thoroughly, and our utmost ambition to discharge it usefully? Perhaps indeed it may be found, that praying well is even a more rare attainment than preaching well; that how averse soever our church may be in opinion to the use of stated forms, we are notwithstanding often ready in effect to run into something not unlike them; that even when we diversify the matter and stile of our devotions most, we are still too apt to fall into a dull formality in the air and manner of them; and that it is truly the most difficult part of a minister's business in public to bring with him to this exercise, and to maintain in the course of it, a recollected and steady mind, attentive at once to God, to the congregation, and to itself; to go through the several branches of it with a fulness and variety of devout and charitable sentiment, with a calm yet earnest contention of the soul, and with views of the Deity, equally distant from presumption and superstition; in fine, to give breath and accent to the whole in decent, signi-

ficant; pathetic words, without either hurrying or drawling or singing them*; and to preserve this spirit to the end, so that what was said of a remarkable suppliant on another occasion may be said of the minister on this I speak of,— may be said by the surrounding worshippers, by the attending Angels, and by the all-searching Jehovah, ‘Behold he prayeth.’— But let us proceed,

In the second place†, to consider briefly the affair of public praise; which, although it depends on us the clergy much less than that of prayer, doth yet no less call for our endeavours, so far as

* A singing or a whining tone should be carefully avoided in prayer as in preaching. We would not use it in addressing our prince; why then use it in addressing our God? Methinks it looks some how little and unmanly, alike unbefitting that exalted employment by which we hold intercourse with Heaven, and unbeseeming that noble nature by which we claim alliance to it. Nor is such a tone, I believe, in general the native voice of ingenuous acknowledgement, or of rational affection. Neither surely are we to solícite the Almighty’s charity with childish and lamentable sounds, as the Mendicant tribe do ordinarily solícite our’s. A modulation solemn but unaffected, humble but undesponding, and plain though properly varied with the matter, is apparently most suitable in speaking to the greatest and the best of Beings.

† This and the following article were omitted in reciting, purposely to save time, the discourse being long,

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they can go, to direct it to the great purposes of piety and edification.

It is real matter of regret, that this, which is unquestionably the noblest part of worship in itself, were not on a better footing in our church. Not to mention, that several of David's Psalms are no ways fit to be used in such an exercise by us, who live under a dispensation of religion so much more benign and peaceful than that under which they were composed; and who are not, that I know of, warranted to join in execrations, which, in a very different state of things, might come with decency from a person invested with all the authority, and supported by all the awe, of the prophetic character: not to insist on this, although it deserves, I think, to be attended to; it were pity but we were provided with a smooth and spirited translation of the rest of those sacred songs; our present one, I speak of that in metre, being for most part miserably harsh and heavy. It is to be wished too, that we were furnished with a right collection of hymns, and other pieces of divine poesy, more particularly suited to evangelical times; and that we were allowed to adopt it into our religious assemblies. There is indeed a smaller collection by no means contemptible, that hath been offered to the public for this very purpose.

some time ago, and accordingly taken into consideration. But we have never yet been fully authorized to make use of it in our churches.

Then with respect to our Psalmody, immediately so called, we are sorry to say, that in the far greater number of our congregations it is absolutely wretched; owing chiefly to our Clerks or Precentors, who most of them neither read with propriety, nor sing with melody, nor behave with solemnity becoming the occasion, but do every thing on the contrary to marr the devotion they ought to promote; as hath been often remarked by strangers who have had access to witness the established worship in Scotland, as well as always regretted by persons of any taste amongst ourselves.

It is not to be expressed what a delightful and happy effect it might have, were those to whom this province is committed, to read the line (if the line must still be read, which is undoubtedly a mighty drawback, and, according to our own approved standard, should only be continued where it is absolutely necessary, I say were they to read the line) with a musical, distinct, and animated voice, and with an unaffected air of seriousness and significance; were they to keep this look and manner throughout; and were they to sing more true,

more plain, and vastly shorter. A reform in this last particular, appears indeed of peculiar moment. Not to speak of the laws of music, which manifestly require it; let it only be considered, that such a method would allow us to go through eight or ten verses in the time we frequently take to draw out four; would thereby fill our minds with a larger train and quicker succession of ideas; and by that means, together with the more strongly enlivened and suddenly diversified sounds, give a finer tone to the imagination, and wind up the affections to an higher key.—If along with this the people were taught, as many of them at least might be, to sing the different parts in concert, so as to compose an harmony more entire and complete, how pleasing and how exalting would be the result of the whole!

Nor should these things, my brethren, be deemed impracticable. We have seen examples of that sort of performance and demeanor which our Precentors ought all to aim at, and which the younger part of them, that are any ways modest and ingenious, might in some good measure attain to, were they put upon the attempt and supported in it. And as to what was last mentioned in relation to the people, it is a certain fact that something considerable in that very way hath been brought

about already in several places, and in places too where such kind of improvements could have been little expected. Why might it not be brought about in all or in most by length of time, if the clergy would enter properly into so laudable a taste, join together heartily, and be at due pains to encourage it? And why should any look upon it as a matter of no consequence, much more of ill consequence?

In general, it must doubtless be highly desirable that the Almighty were praised in a lively and harmonious, rather than a dull and dissonant manner. If he that formed the voice hath made it capable of musical expression; if 'he that planted the ear' hath laid it open to musical delight; and if 'he that gave man understanding' hath endowed him with a power of cultivating both, and of being moved and ravished with their wondrous energy; doth not piety, doth not justice demand that this power should be exerted in the service of the Giver? It is very true that mere 'bodily service' profiteth nothing; and the sovereign Spirit, the invisible Father, ought ever to be 'worshipped in spirit and in truth.' But are we mortals, really so spiritually-minded of ourselves, as to want no external aid in our efforts this way? Are these souls of our's so very elevated and vigorous

naturally, as to need nothing to advance or sustain them in their flight towards Heaven and God? Are we not, in one word, compounded creatures; and should we not do our utmost to glorify our great Creator not only in our spirits, but 'in our bodies which are his?'

Whence comes it then that our church is the only one in Christendom, so far as I know, where the influence of music in the worship of God is so generally neglected? This surely must be admitted, that where-ever it is duly studied and properly conducted, scarce any thing can be conceived more transporting or more heavenly. We may add, that were it studied and conducted amongst us to tolerable purpose, it would be in all probability attended with this particular advantage, that many of better rank and education, who now sit silent in our worshipping assemblies (often, I fear, without any sufficient excuse) would be then drawn as by an irresistible charm to join in their Maker's praise; and none could have room to complain of a piece of barbarism still remaining in our worship, at a time when we are so greatly refined in many other instances of far less consequence.

Before we leave this branch of our subject, may we be permitted to propose it as a problem

not unworthy our consideration, 'Whether it might not be of real service, to have stated meetings in public for the business of prayer and of praise alone?' — Is there not cause to apprehend the generality have a notion, that the chief if not the only valuable end of going to church is to hear sermon, as at present they never go there, without hearing it? Do they not often betray a visible impatience till prayer is over, that they may be entertained with something more to their liking? And when the discourse is ended, do we not frequently see persons go away, (I speak not of servants who may be obliged to do it) as if they reckoned what remained of little or no significance, and in hearing the minister preach they had got all they came for? Doth not the very phrase of 'going to hear sermon,' so common with most, seem to imply that they consider all beside, but in a subordinate view at best? Now would it not be worth our while, my brethren, to attempt the rectifying of an opinion so palpably wrong and pernicious, by assembling at proper times for the more immediate acts of worship solely; in assisting at which, without any thing else, such mistaken people might be made sensible of the superior importance and pleasure of devotion, and might come at last to regard the house of God mainly as 'an house of prayer,' and withal as a school for

learning the services and songs of the upper sanctuary?

Possibly it may be said, that few would care to attend upon meetings of that kind. At first perhaps it might be so. But as the more pious and serious would ordinarily attend when they could, who can tell but that in time their example might have influence, their neighbours might gradually catch the happy infection, and a more prevalent taste might at length take place for those sweetest and most improving of all employments? Have we reason to look for such a taste, so long as we appear, by our method of managing, to give less attention to these than to other religious exercises of an inferior nature?

How different in this respect was the practice of the primitive church! As praying and singing of Psalms made the principal part of their worship on all occasions, so it was customary in most places to meet for these singly, on the evening of the Lord's day, and likewise the night before in what they called their vigils or antelucan assemblies. Those assemblies indeed were first begun in times of persecution, to elude the violence of their enemies. We find however they held them afterwards, when they had nothing to fear. And al-

though this morning-service was very long, continuing commonly in psalms and hymns and prayers from mid-night till break of day, yet was it generally attended with great alacrity and assiduity by men of all ranks; such was the order of those early Christians in religion, and so strong their relish for these highest duties of it!

II. Let us now go on to our public instructions, and enquire how they may be managed to the greatest edification? And

First, with regard to lecturing, as we term it. I need not tell my reverend auditors how much this sort of exercise prevailed in the first ages of the church, nor how well it is calculated, when properly performed, for promoting the knowledge and love of the scriptures, with all the good effects that can be supposed to flow from thence. — I said when properly performed. For as to the method often used of discussing every word; of criticising at every turn, of correcting the translation almost in every passage, without any real necessity or important reason for it; of finding mysteries almost in every sentence, phrase, or syllable; of torturing every single verse or member of a verse, to squeeze from it at any rate a certain quantity of observations; of laying equal stress on

all the portions of scripture that may occur, or on all the articles comprehended in each portion; of giving a formal and frigid paraphrase or tedious explication of every part, even the most simple and intelligible; in short of running into all the minutenesses of a dull and tasteless commentator: it is easy to see how remote all this is from the great purpose of 'godly edifying;' however much it may make ignorant hearers stare with wonder in the mean time, or talk with admiration afterwards of the minister's profound sagacity and learning.

I submit it to you, my brethren, whether they are not more likely to profit, where the particular connexion, if any there be, is briefly pointed out; where the general scope, if not sufficiently obvious of itself, is fairly represented in as few words as possible; where matters of any difficulty are unfolded naturally with the help of such criticisms as seem unstrained; where errors in the version of real moment are modestly rectified; where circumstances of history requisite to the discovery of the writer's meaning, or of any peculiar weight or beauty in themselves, are either touched, or if needful dwelt upon, in a spirited manner; where points of distinguished importance, or of remarkable aptness to the present occasion, are judiciously singled out, set forth in a fuller light, and

brought home with a stronger energy on the hearts of the hearers; in fine, where the whole is so conducted as may tend, under God, both to enlighten them with a true understanding of the place of scripture in question, and to impress them with a proper feeling of the facts, the doctrines, or the precepts it exhibits.

Having mentioned the facts of scripture, I would take this opportunity to move it as another problem, that may deserve to be considered, Whether our lectures ought not to turn more frequently than is usual with many, on the historical passages of holy writ, both in the Old Testament and in the New especially?—The intention of the exercise appears not to admit of insisting very long on each particular, but rather to require most ordinarily a view of things somewhat general and cursory; it being properly or principally destined for expounding the scriptures. Now, I humbly conceive that the doctrines and the morals of religion are mostly of such a nature, as to demand a more minute consideration and ample detail, to be spread out more largely and consequentially, to be pressed with greater force, and applied with greater amplification, than are well consistent with such a brevity of manner. Therefore what if they were oftener reserved for the subject of sermons; which

whilst they afforded fairer room for these, might give the preacher the fullest scope for introducing, illustrating, and improving such passages from the sacred volumes, as are chiefly of the doctrinal or the moral kind?

The peculiar advantages of insisting a good deal in our lectures on the most remarkable and important facts of scripture, I take to be such as these; acquainting the people more distinctly with some of the most essential parts of revealed religion which turn immediately on those very facts*; —giving them the most edifying views of the dispensations of God in the successive ages and oe-

* We may notice by the way, that the facts in general constitute a much more considerable part of revelation than is commonly adverted to; and that the main stress not only of the evidences by which it is supported, but of the obligations which are founded on it, seems to rest upon them. In this view, may it not be considered chiefly as a divine composure containing an authentic account of the Almighty's dispensations, as they relate more particularly to the restoration of an apostate race by his son Jesus Christ? Nothing indeed could be better devised than this, in a religion that was designed for universal use, and addressed even to the most vulgar minds: since it is certain, I think, that these are much more readily and more deeply impressed by arguments drawn from a series of striking and momentous events, in many of which the very highest interests of men are represented as intimately concerned,

conomies of the church; — placing full before them the virtues of the saints, and the example of ‘the King of Saints,’ to excite their imitation; — shewing them at large the weaknesses of the greatest and the miscarriages of the best men, to

than by such as are fetched merely from the abstract reasons and hidden relations of things. The last of necessity make their way but slowly and feebly into the grosser understandings of the bulk of mankind, little if at all accustomed to more connected and refined speculations. The first, falling in with their natural and moral feelings, that are less dependent upon culture, and operating on their affections through the imagination, which they are eminently fitted to take hold of, must needs produce a more speedy and a more vigorous conviction. It is very observable, that the Apostles, in their discourses, insisted principally on this latter topic of persuasion, dwelling still on the grand facts of Christianity, and from thence inculcating the various duties of it, by obvious consequence and perspicuous precept, instead of having recourse to subtil reasoning and tedious deduction. It may likewise be remarked, that what we call religious knowledge, that I mean which influenceth practice, will, in most part of true Christians, be found to consist in this feeling kind of conviction arising from an affecting survey of the very facts we are speaking of, and in certain detached sentiments of truth and goodness imprinted on the heart by means of these in a great measure, rather than in any regular system of spiritual dogmata, or laboured concatenation of theological opinions. Will it not follow from all this, that the preachers of the gospel should embrace every opportunity of explaining and applying the scripture history?

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teach them humility and circumspection;—
painting on the other hand the vices and the fol-
lies of bad characters left on record, and those
of several degrees and in different conditions, to
beget horror and aversion in all sorts of men;—
representing the conduct of providence towards
these opposite classes of the righteous and the wick-
ed, to prove it engaged on the side of goodness,
and ‘set against those that do evil;’—and finally
rouling the attention, seizing the imagination, and
actuating the passions of the audience, by an end-
less variety of scenes the most interesting that can
pass in review before the intellectual eye; under
the impression of which scenes, a thousand beauti-
ful and useful instructions may be insinuated in the
happiest manner, whilst the glow of feeling is fresh
upon the hearers, and the reflections suggested by
the history, are, through the power of conscience
and the preacher’s art, turned inward on them-
selves; so that their case shall frequently resemble
that of the guilty prince of Israel, who was drawn
by the address of the eloquent Prophet to condemn
himself ere he was aware. This is in the best sense
to ‘catch men with guile,’ that I may allude to
a lively expression of our Apostle.

But to accomplish these ends in our historical le-
ctures, they had need to be managed both with

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judgment and spirit. Objects must often be spoke of as if present, and scenes as if immediately acting; the preacher in those instances sustaining in some sort the part of a chorus, (if we may be excused to borrow an allusion from the ancient theatre) interposing from time to time such reflexions, and breaking out into such exclamations, apostrophes, or soliloquies as the occasion seems to dictate, which must however be short and few, as well as evidently seasonable. Then the most material circumstances must be still carefully selected and suitably improved, whilst the rest are hinted at but slightly. The piece must not be overloaded, nor the personating pursued too far; as every thing beyond the reserve and simplicity of nature is ready to baffle the very end it aims at. Add to all, that the more the composition and manner are diversified, the more will the auditory be kept awake, and the less will their affections have leave to grow cool. A rule of sovereign importance in every species of popular address! — Perhaps indeed it may be alleged, that the affair of lecturing hath nothing to do with the affections of the hearers. But I should humbly apprehend the contrary; since it seems to me apparent, that the bare understanding of sacred truths, without the real impression of their power and beauty, will be of mighty small significance. — We shall only here

subjoin, that for the sake of that variety which is so wonderfully taking, it might be adviseable, in the course of lecturing to make now and then removes to different books or parts of scripture, and not always to confine ourselves regularly to any one.

Were we to follow some such plan as this, is there not ground to think that the exercise we speak of might be found, by the blessing of God, singularly profitable, indeed so profitable as to be entitled to much more of our time in church than we now afford it? Why, at any rate, we should invariably limit it to a particular part of the Lord's day, beyond which it must never extend, is not perhaps so easy to conceive. Many are of opinion, and I believe with reason, that when it is but tolerably conducted, it is more useful frequently than all our other discourses*.

* Considering the peculiar usefulness of lecturing, it's being practised so regularly as is done in our church, is indisputably a very laudable custom. Nevertheless, I cannot help regretting that it should have been made the innocent occasion of shutting out the public reading of the holy scriptures by themselves; which we all know is recommended by our Directory, and if I am not mistaken, is in use amongst all our Protestant brethren; as it was for certain in the ancient church, where whole chapters or large portions out of both Testaments were statedly read to the people; and this being agreeably in-

But secondly, with respect to our sermons, let us enquire in what manner these may be rendered most conducive to edification, and that both as to the body and the spirit of them, if we may be indulged the phrase.

I. As to the body of our sermons. Let us suppose a minister of good sense and some ability to be deeply possessed with the maxim in the text; that his very soul burns with zeal for the salvation of men, and swells with ambition to advance it; that he keeps this worthiest of ends in his eye continually, overlooking in comparison every inferior one: What do you think, brethren, this man will study in the choice he makes of subjects for preaching?—Will he study what subjects may best please himself, or may most gratify his hearers, or may be easiest to treat, or may afford him the fairest access to play the learned critic, or

termixed with the other parts of worship, answered a variety of valuable purposes.—Thus much is manifest, that when it is distinctly and devoutly performed, it must tend not a little to excite and cherish a veneration for the inspired writings, and a disposition to read them at home; and moreover that it gives those who either cannot or will not read them themselves, an opportunity of hearing them more fully than they could otherwise do, especially as at present most ministers commonly read and explain but few verses at a time.

the fanciful allegorist, or the subtil logician, or the specious declaimer, and thereby to acquire a reputation amongst people of a certain taste, without considering all the while whether those subjects are like to be most useful to his flock, by answering their greatest spiritual necessities in the particular circumstances wherein they are? — ‘What!’ will he be apt to say, ‘are numbers dropping in-
 ‘to the dust about me? Are the lives of the survivors short at longest, precarious at best, and
 ‘much of them already gone? Am I put in trust
 ‘with this ministry as one that must give an account, for certain soon, peradventure before a
 ‘few days are expired? And must these persons
 ‘be truly religious, or lost for ever? Is there any
 ‘room then for trifling in this matter? Or shall I,
 ‘amidst such awful uncertainties, and such infinite
 ‘things in dependence, put men off with a few
 ‘critical observations on a text, or a few unsub-
 ‘stantial strainings of a metaphor, or some idle dis-
 ‘pute of the schools, or some dry dissertation of
 ‘philosophy, or a pretty play whether of words
 ‘or of thoughts on any theme whatever; instead
 ‘of telling them, and that in a natural, plain, per-
 ‘suasive manner, something that pertains to life
 ‘and godliness, something that tends to restore
 ‘them from their apostacy to glory and virtue, by
 ‘enlightening the ignorant, or awakening the se-

‘cure, or convincing the gainsayer, or converting the sinner, or by improving, confirming, and comforting the righteous?’ — Surely he will reject the thought with inexpressible abhorrence; and breaking nobly through every thing vain and frivolous, how plausible soever, that would obtrude itself upon him, he will fasten with unalterable firmness on ‘the weighty matters of the law’ and of the gospel, drive directly at the supreme and everlasting interests of men, and center all his views in this single ruling point of usefulness.

There is no doubt a sort of subordinate and secondary themes, which he will find it necessary sometimes to handle, not only on account of their connexion with what is highest, but also because the human mind requires a seasoning from the side of novelty and entertainment; which may be expedient too in this case, to render the audience more attentive and docile, from an opinion of the preacher’s depth and literature. But still he will take care to bend such curious and amusing subjects into a just subserviency to the all-directing aim of edification.

We need scarcely observe, what is so very obvious, that the minister we talk of will often take occasion to inculcate largely real conversion to

God, and vital faith in the Son of God; and having thus laid the foundation deep, to erect upon it a glorious superstructure of Christian morals, always shewing how the several virtues of a godly life grow from those divine principles, and are all enforced by revelation as well as pointed out by reason.

As his instructions will evermore be of an evangelical turn, and a practical tendency; so he will not, I am persuaded, satisfy himself with general dull harangues either on the doctrines or on the precepts of the gospel; or with barely telling men they must believe, or they must be holy; but will descend into particulars, explain that belief intelligibly, characterize that holiness distinctly, lay open the beginnings, the workings, the progress, and the parts of both in the case of a true Christian, survey the several aspects they assume, and the various vicissitudes they undergo, in the same or different persons, expose with unrelenting hand their counterfeits, and detect with unwearied accuracy the collusions of self-deceit; careful all along to solve the more perplexing doubts of the sincere, and to obviate the more dangerous objections of others.

Again, such a minister will be extremely cauti-

ous not to bring the terms of salvation too low, or to preach a relaxed morality; which there is ground to suspect is many times done, and which whensoever it is done must prove, I imagine, exceedingly hurtful. I am sure our Master doth no such thing, but indispensably requires a thorough regeneration, an obedient faith, and all the branches of an holy life. These he insists upon peremptorily, repeatedly, and without any exception, in all who would study in his school, or submit to his discipline. Yet how few of those who profess to do so, seem heartily convinced of this! Even of them who make the highest pretensions, how very few in comparison are strictly honest, universally humane, and uniformly sober, as well as unaffectedly devout! How few of the Christians of these degenerate days have yet learned the first lesson of their religion, 'To deny themselves!' How very few of our modern penitents mind that poor neglected duty of restitution; a duty, I am afraid, but seldom urged by us, according to it's importance. — As for the generality, they appear to have no idea that the virtuous practice is essential to religion. A circle of ceremonial performances, a system of orthodox opinions, a zeal for one party against all the rest, certain favourite phrases which they do not understand, certain warm imaginations which they cannot explain, or

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at most a defective form of godliness or virtue, the effect of internal mechanism or of external motives, joined with a confident reliance on the mercies of God and the merits of Christ, are all the attainments they apprehend necessary to salvation; and whoever is possessed of these cannot, in their judgment, possibly miss of it.

To what are such gross and prevalent delusions owing? The enemies of the church will answer the question with pleasure. We shall only say, it is the business of the clergy to disabuse the people in matters of such unspeakable moment, by shewing them their mistake, as well from the scriptures of God as from the nature of things; and to display before them with undaunted resolution a more just and noble standard of religion, even the genuine gospel of Jesus in all it's divine extent. I said with undaunted resolution; for I am well aware that this kind of preaching is in itself highly unpopular, being directly repugnant to the religious prejudices and depraved passions of mankind.

We do not deny but it is possible to preach an over rigorous morality, or to propose such rules of life as are really not compatible with the condition of humanity, nor any where enjoined by the laws of Christianity; an institution no less merci-

ful than holy, breathing all the benignity and sweetness of it's Founder, who hath too tender 'a fellow-feeling of our infirmities' to 'bind upon us heavy burdens,' and is much too good 'to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax.' We who are ushers in the school of this indulgent Master ought to teach not only on his plan, but in his spirit too. By imposing unreasonable tasks on the scholars, we should hinder instead of promoting their proficiency, as that would be the way to irritate or dispirit them, and to breed a dislike to our better instructions. We are not surely 'to make sad the heart of any whom God hath not made sad;' that is those who, amidst a thousand unallowed and lamented imperfections, are honestly endeavouring to serve him. On the contrary, we are 'to speak a word in season to the weary soul, and to pour the oil of joy into the wounded spirit.' But yet at the same time we are to beware 'of healing the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, or of strengthening the hands of the wicked by promising him life.' That I may say the thing at once; we are never to administer comfort to any but on the terms of Christ's religion.

Nothing is more usual with many of it's professors, than to talk much of their doubts and

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fears, and to complain heavily of the hardness of their hearts, of the weakness of their faith, of the wanderings of their thoughts in prayer, and the like. And it is not to be questioned, but these complaints are frequently too well grounded. But perhaps it might not be amiss, that such persons were oftener directed to look a little more to their temper and their conduct in life, and taught to complain too of their pride, their passion, their worldly-mindedness, their discontent, their dissingenuity, their want of charity, their neglect of duty whether to God, to man, or to themselves; and called upon in consequence of this to seek the cure of these disorders; which, so long as they are suffered to remain in their full force, will fester so within their bosoms, as often to mock the strongest palliatives, and always to prevent any settled ease.

There is indeed a certain sort of peace which numbers have the art of speaking to themselves, when the unerring Inspector 'speaks no peace.' Shall we forward the dangerous delusion by uttering 'smooth things and prophesying deceits?' Shall we lull by such fatal opiates the souls we should awaken, and thus betray them into final impenitence and reprobation! O treacherous cruel mercy! — No, no! let us be true to our pro-

cession, and give charitable pain; tell men of their danger, 'whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear;' and, by laying open their corruptions to the very bottom, contribute to the recovery of a distempered world. In order to this, we must attend carefully to the particular diseases that prevail amongst our flocks, whether they are more special or more epidemic; and trace their various and complicated symptoms as far as is consistent with the decorum of public addresses; adapting our applications as much as may be to the respective ages, conditions, and complexions of our patients, as they are elder or younger, higher or lower in life, of harder or of softer natures.

But to change the metaphor: As we are to paint the different shades of vice and folly so distinctly, that different sinners may recognize themselves in the portraits which represent them; we are always to avoid those caricatures, (if it may be permitted here to speak in the stile of painters) which, by shewing things too big and strong, would but soothe the spectators in their security, whilst they only beheld such odious crimes exposed as they were no ways conscious of, and so were led to think that they were either wholly innocent or but little guilty, because not chargeable with the most enormous wickedness.

We shall only add with relation to what we termed the body or substance of our sermons, that amongst many useful and necessary subjects, those of secret prayer, of family religion, of Christian education, of early piety, of sanctifying the sabbath, and of searching the scriptures, seem to challenge a larger place than is ordinarily allotted them; since they may be justly, I think, considered as principal sources of a general reformation, without which we shall look and labour for it in vain.

2. As to the spirit and composition of our sermons, I am more and more convinced that a supreme regard to edification will be our best direction here, as it ought infallibly to be our highest principle.

You cannot, my brethren, have failed to observe, that the majority of those who frequent our religious assemblies seem to consider our preaching as a certain task which we are to perform, because it is our trade, as they are pleased sometimes to stile it, and their hearing as a stated practice, which they are to keep to, because it is the custom; that accordingly they regard what we say to them from this chair as so many words of course, to be measured by the half-hour; which half-hour is no soon-

er expired than they look with apparent impatience till we have done; and then what remains of the usual round of worship being over, they gladly disperse, quite pleased to think they have discharged so notably the duty of the day, and fully satisfied that they are excellent Christians. Why?—Because truly they have been at church, and heard sermon. Mean while perhaps they give not themselves the trouble to recollect a sentence of it; or if they do, it is only as a matter of mere speculation, in which they never once dream they have any personal concern, or take any further share than just to talk about it, to apply it very probably to some of their neighbours, and to applaud or condemn the preacher. — Now to what shall we attribute this common abuse. You will say, to the stupidity or the perverseness of the hearers. Well, but do we the clergy exert ourselves as we ought, to prevent or to cure it?

Not to speak here of taking frequent occasion to animadvert on the guilt and the folly of it, and to remind men of the true intention of hearing the public instructions; do we labour, for example, in preparing our discourses, to give them that natural unstudied air, which may make them appear not so much the effort of the head, the flowering of the fancy, or the fruit of learning, as the dictates

of good sense, of inward conviction, and of real feeling? Have we greatness enough to despise whatever tends not either to instruct or to persuade, however it might glitter in our own imagination, or in the eye of half-discerning judges? Have we reflexion enough to remember, that because a thought, an argument, a principle is palpable to us, it doth not certainly follow it will be so to all who hear us, and that therefore things must be rendered wondrous plain to the people? In short have we taste enough to distinguish justly between a philosophical essay, or a theological lecture, or a starched oration, and a popular, practical, pithy address, wherein the preacher is careful to accommodate himself as much as possible to the meanest understandings, to bring all close to the consciences of men, and to speak as one really speaking to them, I say to them; looking at them with meaning, turning on them frequently, appealing to them earnestly; and always interesting their judgment, their experience, and their hearts in what he is delivering? Like those glorious speakers of antiquity, never enough admired or imitated, who had too much knowlege of human nature, to talk in a vague and general strain, how elegant or splendid soever, but pointed all strongly to their audience, and poured upon them from time to time such torrents of home-directed

oratory as carried them away with pleasing violence. — The sum of what we mean, may be expressed in the following maxim; ‘ So to manage, that the hearers shall still see us regarding them, shall still hear us addressing them, and plainly perceive all along that it is they themselves we want to convince, to move, to profit.’

This simple maxim, if duly minded, would, amongst innumerable other advantages arising from it, help to explode the unedifying practice of dry tedious explications, and long-winded proofs, that often engross the greatest part of the sermon; whilst the application of all to life and the affections, which is in truth the very soul of preaching, is flurred over in a few hasty inferences or insipid reflexions, wherein the auditors usually take as little concern as in all the rest; and, which having neither pathos nor painting nor unity, but being at best so many scattered apophthegms, and those perhaps coolly enough delivered, must needs leave as little impression.

It may be likewise observed on the head of composition, that in attacking popular mistakes in points whether of faith or of morals, it will be frequently prudent to begin with making all the concessions possible, and expressing all the aversion

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imaginable to those erroneous principles which happen to be the object of popular dislike; in fine, to go the utmost lengths that truth will let us, to meet the persons we would set right, till we have fairly conciliated their favour and confidence; and then gradually to draw them from their wrong opinion, by displaying more gently at first the error of it; and when by this method we have gained some ground, to grow more warm and bold against it; demonstrating with all the evidence of argument and energy of language, but especially from express declarations of holy writ, what they are to think of the point in question; of which we should come at last to talk with that freedom, firmness, and full persuasion, which will help to rivet the impression, and by the sympathetic workings of the human mind will bring them to acquiesce in the representation we have given them.

I would only take notice further, that when we have occasion to exclaim more loudly against the corruptions of our hearers, we should sometimes give them to understand, that we enter on so unpleasant a task with the utmost reluctance; that nothing could induce us to it, but a deep conviction of it's being absolutely necessary for the saving of their souls, and for the delivering of our own;

that like a tender-hearted parent who feels himself every stroke he lays upon his child, we do it only to prevent a worse thing to themselves and to us; that however insensible any of them may be of their own guilt or danger, we are truly affected with both, and that nothing could yield us such transcendent delight as to contribute to their reformation and welfare.

An honest detestation of vice, bursting forth at times into a flame of indignant zeal, and kindling the preacher's stile, as well as countenance, pronunciation, and gesture, is not in the least incompatible with those pious meltings of grief and affection. And when these relieve each other by turns, and the speaker is either fired or dissolved, as the face of wickedness stares upon him with all its impudence, or as the train of woes that follow it present to his imagination their pitiable looks; when he is carried through so fine a vicissitude of virtuous emotions, is it possible for his auditory to avoid feeling in some degree a correspondent interchange of shame and of sorrow, the severe but salutary distress of repentance?

Being led thus naturally to speak of the expressions of a well informed and rightly tempered zeal, give me leave, by way of conclusion, to recom-

mend them *. Now I submit it, my brethren, to your better understanding, whether supposing a clergyman possessed of known worth, and that intrinsic dignity which attends it, he might not with real advantage to religion abound more in these than is generally practised. I submit it to you, whether a bolder appearance for truth and righteousness, and a stronger testimony against their contraries, whether in particular a more open, unsparing, and unshaken reprehension of sin wheresoever found, in a word, whether what the high-spirited Apostle calls 'rebuking with all authority,' might not be expedient, or rather doth not seem necessary, in an age of daring and triumphant transgression.

When 'iniquity lifts up its head as unashamed;' when the morals of men are so avowedly debauched; when the profession of Christians is so vilely prostituted to the purposes of pride, of knavery, of inhumanity; when the principles of revealed and even of natural religion are attacked so insolently by the bad; and when the love of both in their spirit and practice is waxed so cold a-

* I intended to have subjoined some remarks relating to the manner of our dispensing the sacraments, particularly that of the Lord's Supper; but was prevented by the discourse's swelling out to a much greater length than was at first expected.

mongst the good; is this a time, my brethren, is this a time for us, who pretend we have taken side with Heaven, to defend it's interests feebly, or to assault it's enemies irresolutely; as if we were almost ashamed of Christ and virtue, or almost afraid to raise their banner in the midst of an unbelieving and wicked generation? — What! shall we fear to speak for God, when others fear not to offend, to affront, to blaspheme him? Shall the advocates for Christianity, for conscience, for immortality, plead a cause weakly, in which the happiness of man, the majesty of the Creator, the honour of his Son, and the glory of his creation are all concerned; when the antagonists of that cause, the retainers to infidelity, debauchery, impiety of every execrable species, are so intrepid in opposing it?

I am sufficiently sensible, and sincerely sorry for it, that religious zeal in general is fallen into disgrace with many, by having been often perverted through want of discretion and charity so far as to degenerate into bigotry, futility, fury, and to become productive of the most pernicious consequences to religion and mankind. But still this is the perversion of a principle in itself highly commendable and beneficial, and still 'it is good
'to be zealously affected in a good thing.'

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Let us figure to ourselves a clergyman, who whilst he expressed both in his words and actions the heartiest good-will to the persons of men, testified the strongest abhorrence of their vices ; who with the utmost moderation as to lesser differences in matters concerning which the sentiments of wise and pious men have never perfectly agreed, evidenced all the warmth imaginable as to the grand distinctions of morality, and the fundamental tenets of Christianity, that is to say, ‘ Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord ‘ Jesus Christ,’ with the various virtues of temper and of life that grow from thence. In fine, let us suppose that this clergyman laboured to inspire others with what he felt himself, a zeal enlightened by knowlege and sweetened by benevolence, to turn mens attention from visionary notions to vital principles, from the characters of ministers and others to their own, from the mere outside of worship to the soul of it, from the management of the church in disputable questions about discipline, order, settling of parishes, and such like, to the rule of their own spirits and the regulation of their lives ; or to sum up all in a sentence, from words to things, from modes to manners, from circumstances to essentials, and that here he exerted all the heat of fancy and flame of affection, joined with all the light of judgment ; what do you imagine

would be the effect? Certainly, will you say, to draw upon him the censures of narrow minds; perhaps to displease some of his hearers so much as to make them relinquish him. Very possibly this may happen in those places where the taste of the people is greatly vitiated. And what then? I say, what then? Will not these inconveniences, if indeed they be any, be abundantly overbalanced in the estimation of such a man, by the sense of his acting the brave and honest part, by the prospect of his contributing to restore the ancient honours of Christian zeal, and by the pleasure of leading some at least to the knowledge and love of true religion, particularly of forming younger persons to a juster relish and a more genuine piety? And do not you think, my beloved brethren, do not you really think, that one follower gained to our Master is worth a thousand gained to ourselves; that one sincere Christian is better than a thousand mere Presbyterians; that to convert or to edify a single soul is nobler and sweeter praise than the empty applauses of a numerous assembly?

It is not, I must confess, a loud injudicious cry of moderation, charity, rectitude, and the like, that will do any good; nor yet a thundering voice and flaming appearance in preaching holiness more

at large, when not supported and regulated by sense, when not inspired and sanctified by devotion, in short, when not seasoned with that unction, or spiritual favour, which serves beyond any thing to recommend religious instructions. But when a minister brings with him into the pulpit these qualifications, accompanies them with the power of a natural, a feeling, and an agreeable utterance, and embellisheth all with the charm of an amiable character; one should think that through time he must necessarily gain upon his hearers, and by the blessing of his Lord, never wanting to true endeavours, prove the efficacious instrument of their edification. And surely, Sirs, the minister who doth so, may be well esteemed an enviable man, if it be true, what humanity suggests, that they are happy who make others so; or if it be certain, what scripture promiseth, that 'they who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.'

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C H A R G E.

DEAR SIR,

WHEN I throw my eye over this vast congregation, I cannot help reflecting with a sort of pleasing surprise on the perfect unanimity with which you are called to labour in it. A consideration that must doubtless animate you not a little in undertaking a charge which might otherwise perhaps appear discouraging. But what lessens indeed my surprise, at the same time that it may add to your encouragement, is a farther reflexion on several peculiar circumstances which have happily concurred to introduce you here with so much advantage.

I will not, lest I should be thought to flatter, speak of your being recommended by your personal character. But I cannot forbear taking notice on this occasion of your felicity in immediately succeeding a man, who, as he hath always himself acted on the principles of peace and mode-

ration with a spirit and a steddiness that few can boast, so hath unweariedly inculcated on his hearers those truly Christian principles. You will give me leave likewise to mention what must have had a very particular influence on your settling in so comfortable a manner in this parish; your being a native of it, and born of a pious and valuable man, who was some time it's minister, who was exceedingly esteemed and beloved by every body in it, and whose memory still continues blessed, and even fresh as though he had died but yesterday. The precious odour which the name of such a father hath left behind it, could not indeed fail to make the son more acceptable. And it will be always sure to do so, if you, Sir, take care, as I trust you will take care, by your behaviour, to preserve and to prolong so sweet a fragrance. — But then on the other hand, — I do not apprehend it will happen, — I was only going to say if it should happen, that you should ever act unworthy your birth and education, the consequence would be — I need not tell you the consequence. But this you will forgive me to tell you, or rather to remind you of, (for you cannot but know it) that those very circumstances which favour your enterance on the theatre where you are now to appear, will render the part you have to act more difficult. Something better assuredly will be

expected from the late Mr. Gibson's son, than from several others; and comparisons will frequently be made between him and his father. One too that comes after the last incumbent, had need to be a man of no small fortitude and assiduity. And then this congregation will naturally look for returns of regard and diligence proportioned to the readiness and harmony they have shewn in calling you.

What those returns are, it is not my intention to say particularly. I hope, my reverend brother, you have considered them well, and are thoroughly resolved by the grace of God to approve yourself an obliging and a dutiful Pastor to 'that flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseer; that being affectionately desirous of them, and longing greatly after them in the bowels of Jesus Christ, you are willing to impart to them your very soul, to make yourself servant unto all, and to become all things unto all men, that you may save the more.' Such, you know, was the temper of the self-denied, the well-bred, and wonderfully benevolent Apostle Paul, who seems to me to have been the greatest man altogether that ever adorned our profession; and greater in nothing than in this, that during the whole course of his ministry he made one entire sacrifice of himself to the salvation of immortal souls, doing eve-

ry thing, enduring every thing, renouncing every thing for that best of ends.

But is there not, you will be ready to ask, a certain kind of dignity, a certain spirit of independence, which every minister of God ought to maintain, out of regard to the majesty of that religion whose advocate he is, to the rights of that Sovereign in whose name he appears, and in fine, to the sacredness of that 'liberty with which Christ hath made him free?' Most certainly there is. And the divine man just now mentioned was highly sensible of this. Never any more condescending, where condescension was right: never any more bold, more determined, more unsubmitting, where the interests of truth, and the honour of his office required it. The instances which might be brought from his history and writings in support of this observation, are innumerable. Nor can you, Sir, be unacquainted with them. To those who are, it may indeed seem strange to hear the same person who saith in one place, that 'he pleased all men in all things,' saying in another, 'Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Jesus Christ.' But surely the Apostle was perfectly consistent with himself. Where-ever he could do it, without departing from the superior duty he owed his Master,

or acting beneath the dignified character of a teacher of Christianity, there he was sure to shew all the sweetness, simplicity, and pliability of a little child. But on the other side, when either the real enemies or the mistaken friends of that glorious cause in which he was engaged, said or acted any thing against it, or when it became necessary in any case to assert the authority of his function; blessed God! what a flaming, free, unconquerable spirit burst forth from him on such occasions! Then, then did all the man and the hero appear, the zealous undaunted champion for truth, for liberty, for God. Thus it is that those expressions seemingly contradictory are easily reconciled. And in this way did the Apostle by his own example point out the wise and happy medium which in one of his Epistles he recommends to all, of 'pleasing every one his neighbour for his good to edification.' An art which it behoves you, Sir, and me, and every one 'who takes part with us in this ministry,' to study in a particular manner. In other words, the great question with us should be, 'By what measures we may so gratify our people, as to promote most effectually their edification?'

If a man is desirous of popularity, with any different view; if as our Apostle expresseth it, 'he

‘ seeks his own things, not the things of Christ;’ may we not boldly pronounce him dishonest to his trust? At any rate, doth not the eager pursuit of popular applause necessarily hurt a minister’s usefulness, by betraying him into meannesses and miscarriages which impair if not destroy his authority and weight, sink him in the opinion of those who have most sense, and lower him in that of those who have least? On the other hand, may not a truly honourable and lasting reputation be ensured in time, without solicitously aiming at it, by a prudent and humane deportment, by a faithful and devout discharge of one’s duty, and by a steady adherence to whatever appears after serious enquiry right, without either courting men’s favour or dreading their displeasure?

Imagine with yourself, Sir, two opposite clergymen; one holding uniformly an upright conduct, equally removed from a proud contempt of human judgment, and from a mean subjection to it; deliberating soundly, acting modestly, and persevering firmly; alike unterrified by censure, and unseduced by flattery — the other turned and tost to and fro with every breath of the giddy populace, ‘ like ‘ a reed shaken with the wind;’ always sacrificing manhood, often disguising truth, and sometimes violating humanity; practising a thousand unbene-

volent, pitiful, prevaricating arts, to do what? To please the silliest creatures on earth; in a word, frequently bartering all that is worthy and estimable for a poor pittance of sordid praise. Imagine, I say, two such opposite characters; and tell me which you think is likely to be most esteemed and most useful.

The former may sometimes lye under a cloud raised by prejudice, by bigotry, by envy; but will still emerge with stronger lustre, like the light of the morning, which breaking from the shades of night 'shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'—The latter may be followed with a flood of vulgar admiration, that may rise very high for a while, but which like all other floods will abate ere long, and like many will shrink at last into a shallow stream, perhaps run out entirely, without so much as leaving a trace behind it.—The former is truly great and elevated, if there is any thing elevated or great in human life, and must, I think, be reckoned such sooner or later by every creature. Yes, there is a grandeur in disinterested and unshaken virtue, that extorts respect from the worst, as it wins it from the best.—The latter is certainly little and contemptible if aught amongst men can deserve to be called so; and such it will seem at last even to common spectators.

The people are more discerning in characters than one would apprehend. And how much soever their self-love may applaud the minister that humours them slavishly, their better judgment will condemn such servility; and they will secretly despise that man, who, by surrendering the dignity he ought to preserve, shews that he doth not reverence himself. What will be the consequence? Every thing he saith and doth in the way of his office, will be attended with less persuasion and significance. The more intelligent part of his congregation will undervalue him; the more forward will trample on him; the more profligate will condemn his profession on his account; and the only method left to maintain his unrighteous fame amongst any, will be by flattering their pride, indulging their caprice, and soothing those very corruptions which it is his business to correct. Thus indeed he may please them, but greatly to their hurt instead of edification. — Whereas the other man whom I have described, having gained a powerful ascendant over the minds of men, by means of an invariable and independent integrity, will of course have it in his power to do them proportionable good, to conquer by degrees their more hurtful prejudices, and to spread amongst them a rational and worthy spirit of piety. When they perceive him ‘not preaching himself,’ nor seeking

his own profit or his own reputation, they will follow him with the very applause he would avoid: and when he is found to employ that applause solely as an engine of farther usefulness, what success in his ministrations may not be expected from so virtuous a popularity?

Such popularity and such success may you, dear Sir, be ever attended with. By earnestly pursuing the latter in a course of superior goodness and firmness, you will most probably arrive at the former; and by chiefly valuing the first for its subserviency to real religion and utility, you will most certainly further the last. You will be truly popular, because truly deserving; and in consequence of both you will be more and more successful; and by how much you are more successful, by so much you will be more happy; and happier, Sir, you cannot be than I shall always wish you.

Do I need to tell the people of this parish, that it will be in their power to contribute a great deal to their minister's happiness? Surely, Sirs, you cannot but know, that much of a pastor's ease and pleasure must depend upon the dispositions of his flock both towards him, and towards that gospel which he preacheth. Hitherto you of this congregation have evidenced a very proper regard to the

person who is now to labour amongst you. See that you continue to do so. You are bound to do so for his father's sake, for his own sake, and what is much more, 'for his work's sake.' You are bound to do so out of reverence for his Master, and out of faithfulness to your engagements. I hope, my friends, you remember that he comes to you in Christ's name, 'to pray you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.' And I trust you have not forgotten, that you have all engaged in effect, and many of you in express and solemn terms under your own hands, 'to give him all due encouragement and submission in the Lord.' But pray have you considered duly what this means?

Many people are apt to make a mighty noise about their right to call a minister, and to express a wonderful fondness to obtain the man they want; who notwithstanding make very little or no conscience oftentimes of their duty to him, when once they have obtained him. Not to mention their despising or neglecting his message in the very beginning; he shall not perhaps be three days amongst them, when they are ready to swallow, to spread, and to divert themselves with some groundless story to his disadvantage. If afterwards he complies not with all their demands, because he thinks them unreasonable, or humours them not in all

their fancies, because he thinks them foolish; if he preacheth sometimes so as to displease them, which must necessarily happen at any rate, but more especially in case he would be strictly conscientious; in particular if he reproves them sharply for their sins, and presseth them warmly to leave them, enters deeply into the detail of their disorders, and 'affirms constantly that they who have believed in 'God should be careful to maintain good works,' not hinting at these transiently, or touching on them slightly, as numbers do, but fully and strongly inculcating, 'in season and out of season,' an honest, sober, charitable, and godly life, as the great end of the Christian doctrine, and the only evidence of a Christian faith; above all, if he votes in a church-court otherwise than they would have him; why then his capacity, diligence, and worth in his profession shall be all, for a time at least, accounted as nothing by many. One single action, one single sermon, I had almost said one single word, perhaps indifferent, perhaps good, perhaps excellent, shall overthrow with them his whole merit. What is right in his conduct shall be misrepresented; what is wrong shall be exaggerated; what is doubtful shall be taken by the left handle. To speak reproachfully of him behind his back, to treat him disrespectfully even to his face, shall be consecrated with the best and the most abused

of all names, that of zeal for religion; and the persons who behave so shall esteem themselves, and be esteemed by some others, 'the excellent ones 'of the earth,' and the only faithful of the land, for 'doing God such good service.'

You are shocked at this account. You have too much reason to be shocked at it: — But you cannot think it altogether just. Would to God it were not. But it is not to be disguised, that such things have been frequently seen — in other parts of our country. — I pretend not to say how it is in this. Do the people here always 'esteem their ministers very highly in love?' Do they always think of them with candor, speak of them with respect, and behave to them with affection? Do they never 'judge them in meat or in drink,' to use a phrase of our Apostle, nor condemn them in matters 'of doubtful disputation,' nor take up an evil report against them without cause, nor criticize on their sermons or on their lives without mercy? Happy ministers, if this be the case in general! Your minister will have ground to think himself happy, if this be the case with you. And then I dare say you will have ground to think yourselves happy likewise.

He, I am well persuaded, wants to do his part

to you with all possible obligingness and sweetness, provided you will let him by using him as you should. But by the way, see that you never desire him to overdo, or expect of him services beyond his strength. Several ignorant unthinking creatures there are, who never consider a minister's health, or what it will admit of. They look on his business as a mighty easy one. They have no notion he should be ever tired or worn out with any part of it. Pray, my friends, remember that your minister is not made of iron, and be tender of his health, as you would wish him to be useful and long useful.

But what I suppose he will look upon as the surest and most acceptable expression of your regard to him, is 'to believe his report,' to receive his reproofs, and to hearken to his instructions as becomes you. Would you oblige him in good earnest? Would you encourage and cherish him to purpose? Then, be persuaded by him to accept of the offers and comply with the proposals he makes you on the part of his Lord, to forsake all your ill courses, to mortify all your ill inclinations, to be attentive hearers of the word, to be strict observers of the sabbath, to be sincere worshippers of God in your retirements and with your households, to bring up your children well, to be dili-

gent in your callings, just in your dealings, temperate in your enjoyments, and kind in your dispositions; to be good husbands, good wives, good parents, good children, good masters, good servants, good neighbours; moderate in your profession of religion, charitable in your opinion of others, and chiefly concerned to be as like Christ yourselves as may be, and to bring those about you to a Christ-like temper and life. — Oh Sirs, if you knew what a comfort it is to a minister, to see sinners reforming, Christians improving, children growing up like ‘plants of renown’ in the nursery of God; a people in short turning every day more knowing, more regular, more religious, and consequently more happy, you could not surely — I was going to say, you could not out of very good-nature deny one so great a pleasure. So great a pleasure Mr. Gibson may enjoy, if you will do as you ought, and will join your prayers with his for a blessing on your mutual endeavours; which may the good God grant you for the sake of the good Saviour. Amen.

THE END.

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